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ABSTRACT

Data from a survey of 1269 parents (of whom 24 percent were single parents) were used to study whether single and married parents differ in their interactions with elementary schools and teachers. Results indicate that initial differences between single and married parents' perceptions of teachers and teachers' evaluations of single and married parents are due to other family and school conditions. Race, parent education, grade level, teacher practices of parent involvement, and overall teacher quality significantly influence parent reports of teacher practices. Single parents also felt more pressure than did married parents to be involved with their children in learning activities at home. Married parents spent more time assisting teachers at school. Study results show the importance of measures of school structures and processes in research on single parents. Single parents had better relations with teachers whose philosophy and practices lead them toward more positive attitudes about parents. Teacher leadership, not parent marital status, influenced parent awareness, appreciation of teachers' efforts, and knowledge about the school program. (Author/CJB)

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Center for Social Organization of Schools

Report No. 353
March 1984

SINGLE PARENTS AND THE SCHOOLS: THE EFFECT OF MARITAL STATUS ON PARENT AND TEACHER EVALUATIONS

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SP 024 886

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Introductory Statement

The Center for Social Organization of Schools (CSOS) has two primary objectives: to develop a scientific knowledge of how schools affect their students, and to use this knowledge to develop better school practices and organization.

The Center works through three research programs to achieve its objectives:

The School Organization Program investigates how school and classroom organization affects student learning and other immediate outcomes of schooling. Current studies focus on parental involvement, microcomputers in schools, use of time in schools, cooperative learning, and other organizational strategies that alter the task, reward, authority and peer group structures in schools and classrooms.

The Education and Work Program examines the relationship between schooling and students' later-life occupational and educational successes. Current projects include studies of the competencies required in the workplace, the sources of training and experience that lead to employment, college students' major field choices, and employment of urban minority youth.

The Schools and Delinquency Program studies the problems of crime, violence, vandalism, and disorder in schools and the role that schools play in delinquency. Ongoing projects address the development of a theory of delinquent behavior, school effects on delinquency, and the evaluation of delinquency prevention programs in and out of schools.

CSOS also supports a Fellowships in Education Research program that provides opportunities for visiting researchers to conduct and publish significant research in conjunction with the three research programs.

This report, prepared by the School Organization Program, uses data from schools and from families to examine the experiences of single and married parents with teacher practices of parent involvement.

ABSTRACT

The single-parent home is one of the major living arrangements of school children today. This paper uses data from a survey of 1269 parents, including 24% single parents, to study whether single and married parents differ in their interactions with elementary schools and teachers.

Results show that initial differences between single and married parents' perceptions of teachers and teachers' evaluations of single and married parents are due to other family and school conditions. Race, parent education, grade level, teacher practices of parent involvement, and overall teacher quality significantly influence parent reports of teacher practices. Children's performance and behavior, teacher practices of parent involvement, and grade level significantly influence teacher evaluations of parent helpfulness at home. Children's achievement and behavior are the main influences on teacher evaluations of the quality of children's homework, but some teachers rate children from single-parent homes lower than other children, even after classroom achievement is taken into account.

Single parents felt more pressure than married parents to be involved with their children in learning activities at home. Married parents spent more time assisting teachers at school. Both groups of parents were concerned about their children's education, worked with their children at home when there were questions about school work, and were generally positive about their children's elementary schools and teachers.

The study shows the importance of measures of school structures and processes in research on single parents. Single parents had better relations with teachers whose philosophy and practices lead them toward more positive attitudes about parents. Single parents reported different treatment from married parents when their children were in the classrooms of teachers who were not leaders in the use of parent involvement, and single parents and their children were viewed less positively by teachers who did not frequently involve parents in learning activities at home. Teacher leadership, not parent marital status, influenced parent awareness, appreciation of teachers' efforts, and knowledge about the school program. These findings required proximate measures of teacher practices that were linked directly to the students and their parents.

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to the families, teachers, and principals who participated in this survey. Studies of schools and families require the kinds of cooperative efforts and understanding that we received from the participating schools and communities.

Many thanks, too, to my colleague Henry Jay Becker who shared responsibility for the design and data collection of the study and offered suggestions on earlier drafts, to Linda Gottfredson, John H. Hollifield and Gary Natriello for helpful advice on earlier versions of the paper, and to Denise Caputo, Barbara Hucksoll, and Hazel Kennedy for assistance in the preparation of the manuscript.

Single Parents and the Schools:
The Effect of Marital Status on Parent and Teacher Evaluations

The one-parent home is one of the major family arrangements of school children today. Over thirteen million children live in single-parent homes, most in mother-only homes and most as a result of separation or divorce. Each year about 2 million children under the age of 18 have parents who divorce. Between 1970 and 1982 there was a 67% increase in the number of children living with one parent. In the United States in 1982, 22% of the households with children -- about 1 in 5 -- were single-parent homes. Membership in one-parent homes is even greater for black children, with 49% of the children under 18 years old in one- parent homes (U.S. Census, 1982). It is estimated that from 40% to 50% of all school-age children will spend some of their school years as part of a one-parent home (Furstenburg, Nord, Peterson, and Zill, 1983; Garbarino, 1982; Glick, 1979; Masnick and Bane, 1980; Svanum, Bringle and McLaughlin, 1982).

In earlier times, single-parent homes were atypical; now they are common. The historic contrast raises many ideological and emotional questions about the effects of single-parent homes on the members of the family. Although much has been written about single parents, their children, their numbers, and their problems, little research has focused on how single parents and their children fit into other social institutions that were designed to serve traditional families. Yet, when single or married parents have children in school, the family and school are inexorably linked.

Researchers from different disciplines have recognized of the importance of understanding how institutions simultaneously affect human development. Litwak and Meyer, 1974, described clearly the potential for cooperation between schools (bureaucratic organizations) and families (primary groups). Coleman, 1974, discussed how individuals struggle with "corporate actors" to establish a balance of power between individuals and the organizations that serve them. Bronfenbrenner, 1979, explicitly called for research on how the interactions of simultaneously socializing environments affect individuals. Others, too, (Dokecki and Maroney, 1983; Leichter, 1974; Schaefer, 1983) have called for research on the family as part of the wider social system. In this paper we examine some connections between families and schools, looking especially at single parents, their children and their children's teachers.

Opinions differ as to whether schools and teachers should be informed about parents' marital status or changes in family structure. Some argue that teachers are biased against children from one-parent homes. They suggest that teachers negatively label children of divorced or separated parents, explain children's school problems in terms of the family living arrangement rather than in terms of teacher practices or individual needs, or assume parental inadequacies before the facts about parents' skills are known (Laosa, 1983; Lightfoot, 1978; Ogbu, 1974; Santrock and Tracy, 1978; Zill, 1983). Others argue that the school should be informed about parental separation or divorce because the teacher provide stability and support to children during the initial period of family disruption, can be more sensitive

to children's situations when discussing families, and can organize special services such as after-school care that may be needed by single parents and working mothers. These discrepant opinions are each supported by parents' accounts of experiences with teacher bias or with teacher understanding and assistance (Carew and Lightfoot, 1979; Keniston, 1977; National Public Radio, 1980; Snow, 1982). There are few facts from research, however, about whether and how teacher practices are influenced by their students' family structures or about how single parents perceive or react to public schools and their children's teachers.

This report focuses on the children's living arrangements that affect the day-to-day communications and interactions of the family and the school. We describe the characteristics of single and married parents and present correlates of marital status. We introduce a simple model that improves upon earlier research on the effects of marital status, parent education, and teacher leadership on parent-teacher exchanges and evaluations. We compare single and married <u>parents' reports</u> of the frequency of teacher requests for parent involvement. Then we look at <u>teachers' reports</u> of the quality of assistance from single and married parents and the quality of the homework completed by children from one- and two-parent homes. Finally, we introduce an explanatory model that places marital status in a fuller social context.

The research takes into account measures of family structure and processes, student characteristics, and school structures and pro-

cesses, including family size, race, parent education, occupational status; student grade level, ability, behavior in class; teacher leadership in parent involvement, experience, overall quality; and other teacher-parent interactions. Unlike earlier research that often used "special problem" samples to study single-parent families (Shinn, 1978), this sample is derived from a state-wide sample of teachers in regular school settings. Most importantly, the data from teachers, parents and students were directly linked, so that effects of teacher practices on parents could be estimated (Epstein, 1983). This means that parents were identified whose children were in particular teachers' classrooms, and that other proximate measures of family and school conditions could be taken into account in estimating effects on parents and teachers appraisals of each others' efforts.

Data and Approach

Surveys of teachers, principals, parents and students in 16 Maryland school districts were conducted in 1980 and 1981. About 3700 first, third, and fifth grade teachers and their principals in 600 schools were surveyed (Becker and Epstein, 1982; Epstein and Becker, 1982). From the orginal sample, 36 teachers were identified who strongly emphasized parent involvement in learning activities at home. ****check Then, 46 "control" teachers were selected who were similar to the case teachers in grade level, type of school district, years of teaching experience, and school population, but who did not emphasize parent involvement in their teaching practice. Among the case teachers, 17 were confirmed by their principals as strong leaders in the

use of parent involvement activities. In all, then, the 82 teachers ranged along a useful continuum of use of parent involvement, with the "confirmed leaders" making the most frequent use of the greatest number of learning activities at home.

The case and control teachers and their principals were interviewed at length about instructional practices in general, and parent involvement practices and leadership. Data were provided on the students' achievements and behaviors in the 82 classrooms. The parents of the children in these 82 teachers' classrooms were surveyed about their attitudes toward and experiences with parent involvement. In all, 1269 parents responded by mail to the survey -- a response rate of 59%. Of these, 24% were single parents -- close to the national average of 22% (U.S Bureau of Census, 1982). Thus, the research provided a sizeable, useful sample of single and married parents for studying the differences in parent involvement from the parents' and teachers' perspectives.

The categories "one-parent home" and "single parent" come from the parents' response on the survey that only one parent lives at home with the child. We prefer the terms "single-parent home," "one-parent home," or "mother-only/father-only home" to describe the living arrangements of school children, rather than the pejorative terms "broken home," "broken family," or even "single-parent family." A single-parent home may or may not be "broken" by marital, economic, or emotional conditions. To determine the "broken" quality of family life requires measures in addition to the structure of living arrange-

ments. A child in a single-parent home may have contact with two parents, but only one parent lives at home when the child leaves for and returns from school. We cannot make distinctions in our data on the cause, choice, duration, or transitions of the single-parent status, nor can we identify the calm or troubled relations in two-parent homes. These are important characteristics of family history and family style that should be included in new studies of family and school effects (Bane, 1976; Eiduson, 1982; Furstenburg and Seltzer, 1983; Shinn, 1978; Zill, 1983).

"Parent involvement" refers to twelve techniques that teachers use to organize parental assistance around reading, discussions, informal learning games, formal contracts, drill and practice of basic skills, and other monitoring or tutoring activities. For example, the most popular parent involvement activities included: ask parents to read to their child or listen to the child read; use books or workbooks borrowed from the school to help children learn or practice needed skills; discuss school work at home; and use materials found at home to teach needed skills. Eight other activities also were used by teachers to establish parents as partners with the teacher to help students attain skills related to their school instructional program. The activities, patterns of teacher use, and effects on parents are discussed fully in Becker and Epstein, 1982; Epstein and Becker, 1982; and Epstein, 1983. Involvement with home learning activities is an advanced type of mutual effort by parents and teachers (Leler, 1983). Parent involvement in home-learning activities includes more parents and has greater impact on more parents than other forms of parent involvement that occur at the school (Epstein, 1983; 1984).

Characteristics of Parents

Table 1 compares characteristics of the single and married parents in the sample. There are several important differences. Significantly more single parents are black, reside in the city, have fewer years of formal schooling, work full time, and have more "only children." The single and married parents are about equally represented by children in the three elementary school grades and in the classrooms of teachers who were confirmed by their principals as leaders in the use of parent involvement. These characteristics of the Maryland sample are similar to those expected from a national sample of single parents. There is great diversity in one- and in two-parent homes. Clearly, it is necessary to statistically control for family socioeconomic and demographic conditions in studies that compare single and married parents.

Table 1 About Here

Single Parents' Reports of Teacher Practices

Parents were asked to report how often their child's teacher requested their involvement on twelve home-learning activities. The sum of the activities used by teachers several times or very often in the course of the school year represents the depth and frequency of teacher use of parent involvement activities. Parents' reports ranged from 0 to 12 frequently used activities, with a mean score of 4.1 and a standard deviation of 3.4. Table 2 shows how single and married

Table 1

Characteristics of Single and Married Parents

	Single Parents N=273 % Respondents	Married Parents N=862 % Respondents
Race*		
White	35.9	73.2
Black	64.1	26.8
Residence*		
City	57.1	27.7
County/Suburb	42.9	72.3
Parent Education*		
Some high school (or less)	27.1	15.2
High school diploma	32.2	38.4
Some college	28.1	22.6
Bachelor's degree	4.8	10.5
Some graduate school (or more)	7.8	13.3
Employment*		
No work outside home	33.1	40.4
Part-time work	11.3	21.4
Full-time work	55.6	38.2
Family Size*		
0 Siblings	24.9	11.7
1-2 Siblings	58.3	71.9
3-4 Siblings	15.0	14.2
Over 4 Siblings	1.8	2.2
Extended family (other adults)	23.8	10.2
Grade level of child		
Grade 1	41.8	38.3
Grade 3	27.8	26.9
Grade 5	30.4	34.8
Teacher Leadership in Parent Involvement		
Confirmed leader	27.5	20.4
Not confirmed leader	72.5	79.6

*Chi-square tests yield significant differences in proportions for single and married parents beyond the .001 level.

parents' reports differ by the educational level of the parents and by the teacher's leadership in parent involvement.

The mean scores and tests of comparisons in the first column of the table show that, compared to married parents, single parents reported significantly more requests from teachers to assist with learning activities at home (4.80 vs. 3.76). The figures in the second column indicate that among single parents, high- and low-educated single parents reported about equally frequent requests from teachers for parent involvement. Among married parents, however, low-educated married parents reported more frequent requests from teachers for parent involvement than did high-educated married parents (4.16 vs. 3.30).

Table 2 About Here

In the third column, the measure of teacher leadership in parent involvement adds important information about the experiences of parents. Single and married parents with children in classrooms of teachers who were confirmed by their principals as <u>leaders</u> in parent involvement, reported more requests than parents whose children's teachers were <u>not leaders</u> in parent involvement. The differences were especially strong between married parents in leader and non-leader classrooms.

Other comparisons listed in column 4 of Table 2 and graphed in Figure 1 reveal differences in single and married parents' reports about teachers who were <u>not leaders</u> in parent involvement. Highly-educated,

Table 2

Parents' Reports of Frequency of Teachers' Use of Parent Involvement (12 techniques)

Means, standard deviations, and test-statistics from multiple comparisons of mean scores of single vs. married, low vs. high educated parents and parents of children in classrooms of confirmed-leader vs. non-leader teacher in parent involvement

	Family Structure		Parent Education a/		Teacher Leadership in Parent Involvement		Other Significant Comparisons of Means
PARENTS' REPORTS OF TEACHERS' USE OF TWELVE PARENT-INVOLVEMENT TECHNIQUES	Single Parent	$\bar{X}$ 4.80*	Low	$\bar{X}$ 4.87	Confirmed Leader	$\bar{X}$ 5.22	Single vs. married, low ed., in non-leader classroom ($\bar{X}$ = 4.73* vs. 3.97)
		s.d. 3.53		s.d. 3.42		s.d. 3.50	
		N (246)		N (144)		N (41)	
					Non Leader	$\bar{X}$ 4.73	
						s.d. 3.39	
						N (103)	
			High	$\bar{X}$ 4.70	Confirmed Leader	$\bar{X}$ 5.28	Single vs. married, high ed., in non-leader classroom ($\bar{X}$ = 4.47* vs. 3.04)
				s.d. 3.70		s.d. 3.52	
				N (102)		N (29)	
					Non Leader	$\bar{X}$ 4.47	
						s.d. 3.77	
						N (73)	Low vs. high ed., married parents, in non-leader classroom ($\bar{X}$ = 3.97* vs. 3.04)
	Married Parent	$\bar{X}$ 3.76	Low	$\bar{X}$ 4.16*	Confirmed Leader	$\bar{X}$ 4.76*	
		s.d. 3.23		s.d. 3.30		s.d. 3.24	
		N (801)		N (433)		N (103)	
					Non Leader	$\bar{X}$ 3.97	
						s.d. 3.30	
						N (330)	
			High	$\bar{X}$ 3.30	Confirmed Leader	$\bar{X}$ 4.63*	
				s.d. 3.08		s.d. 3.04	
				N (368)		N (60)	
					Non Leader	$\bar{X}$ 3.04	
						s.d. 3.03	
						N (308)	

* t-test significant at or beyond the .05 level.

a/ Parent education is high if the respondent attended or graduated from post-secondary school; low if parent attended or graduated from high school only.

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single parents in these teachers' classrooms reported significantly more requests than highly-educated married parents (4.47 vs. 3.04). Low-educated, single parents reported significantly more requests than low-educated married parents (4.73 vs. 3.97).

Figure 1 About Here

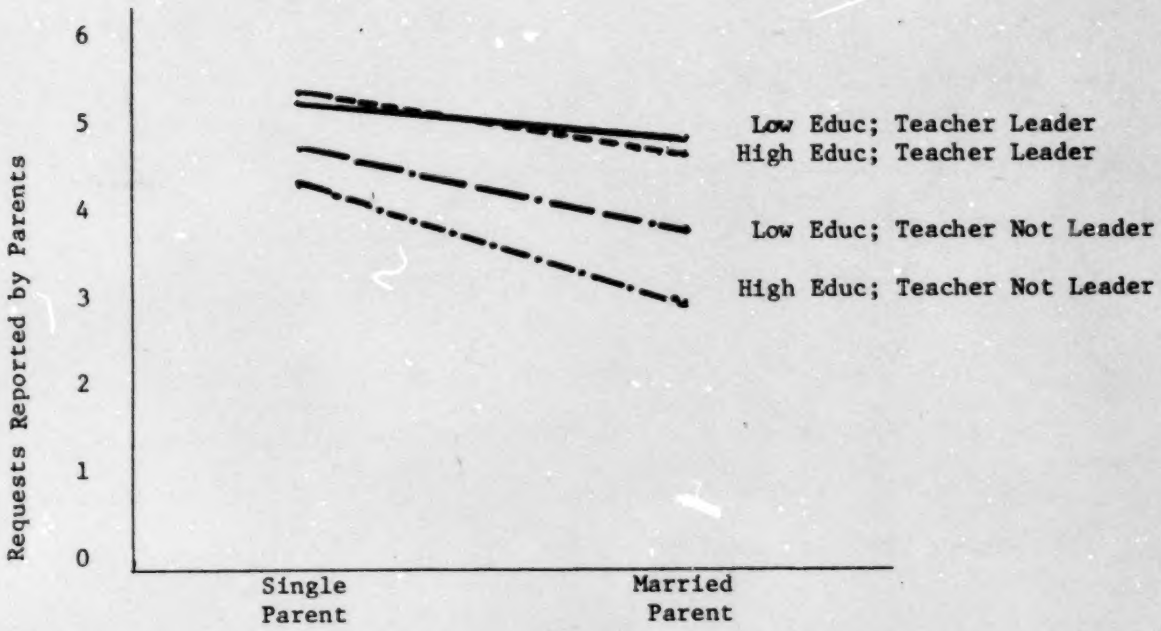
The important patterns in Table 2 and Figure 1 can be summarized in two sentences:

- Single parents, regardless of their educational level, report more requests from teachers than do married parents to be involved in learning activities at home.
- According to parents, teachers who are confirmed leaders in parent involvement make about equivalent requests of all parents, regardless of education and marital status, whereas other, non-leader teachers ask more of single and low-educated parents.

If we looked only at the differences in parent involvement by marital status in column 1 of Table 2, we would not have seen that married parents with fewer years of schooling reported more requests by teachers for parent involvement than did married parents with more education. If we looked only at the statistics about marital status and educational levels in columns 1 and 2, we would have missed an important link between families and schools because column 3 shows that teacher practices affect parents' experiences. Parents reported that teachers who were leaders in parent involvement did not make signifi-

Figure 1

Average number of parent-involvement techniques requested frequently of single and married parents with high and low education



cantly different demands of parents with different marital status or educational levels. Indeed, the mean scores show that teacher leaders made high demands of all parents for parent involvement. Other teachers who were not leaders in parent involvement made greater demands on single and low-educated parents than they did on married and high-educated parents. It is not enough, then, to examine marital status as a factor that affects parents' experiences with schools or teachers. Research on single parents and the schools must also take into account parental education, as suggested in earlier studies, and, as shown here, must take into account teachers' philosophies and practices concerning parents.

Although Table 2 and Figure 1 improve upon earlier studies that looked only at marital status and family background, it is possible that the effects identified with these variables are due to other influential characteristics. Table 3 shows the results of using a more complete model to examine these effects. The first line of Table 3 reports the independent effects of the three variables that were introduced earlier in the sample. Single parents, low-educated parents, and parents whose children are in classrooms of teachers who were leaders report receiving more frequent requests from teachers for involvement in learning activities at home.

Table 3 About Here

Table 3

Effects of Measures of Family, Student, and Teacher Characteristics on Parents' Reports of Teacher Practices of Parent Involvement

	FAMSTR[a]	PARED	TCHLDR	PARWORK	RACE	SEX	ACH	DISC	GRADE	YEARST	TQUAL	PARCOMF	TKNOCH	TALKHLP	R^2
INITIAL MODEL	-.116*[b]	-.108*	.126*												.048
FULL MODEL	-.006	-.102*	.071*	.046	-.238*	-.029	-.055	.003	-.114*	.053	.072*	.071*	.238*	.211*	.286
	(-.138)[c]	(-.133)	(.141)	(.047)	(-.306)	(-.039)	(-.134)	(.020)	(-.195)	(-.029)	(.130)	(.114)	(.328)	(.296)	

[a] Variables are: FAMSTR=one- or two-parent homes; PARED=Schooling from less than high school (0) to graduate school (5); TCHLDR=Teacher's leadership or lack of parent involvement confirmed by principal (0-4); PARWORK=No work (0) or work (1) outside home by parent; RACE=Black (0) or white (1); SEX=Male (0) or female (1); ACH=Reading and math skills ranked by teacher (0-6); DISC=Lo (-1) or High (+1) discipline problems; GRADE=Students' grade in school (1) (3) or (5); YEARST=Number of years teacher experience (0-36); TQUAL=Principals rating of teacher overall quality on instruction and classroom management (0-4); PARCOMF=Parent feeling comfortable and welcome at school (1-4); TKNOCH=Parent report that teacher knows child's individual learning needs (1-4); TALKHLP=Teacher talked to parent about how to help child at home (0/1). Parents' Reports refers to the number and frequency of teacher requests for up to twelve techniques to involve parents in learning activities at home.

[b] Standardized regression coefficients are reported. N=1135. *Indicates coefficient is signifnicant at or beyond the .01 level.

[c] Zero-order correlations are in parentheses.

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The second line of the table introduces other characteristics of the family, student, and teacher that may also affect parents', teachers' and students' interactions and evaluations of each other. Race of parent and student is the key variable that mediates the effect of single-parent status on parents' reports of teacher practices. More black parents head one-parent homes in this sample (as in the nation), and black parents report receiving more requests for parent involvement than do white parents, regardless of marital status. This pattern reflects, in part, the policies of the urban district in which most of the black parents in this sample reside. Teachers in the urban district report more use of parent involvement practices (Becker and Epstein, 1982) and the parents concur. The pattern may also reflect a general trend for black parents to let teachers know they want to be involved in their children's education (Lightfoot, 1978). Teachers tend to use parent involvement when children need extra help (Becker and Epstein, 1982). In this sample, the correlation of race (white scored 1; black scored 0) with classroom achievement in math and reading is .154. Thus, the variable "race" reflects several concurrent conditions and reduces the importance of marital status as an independent influence on parents' perceptions.

The regression coefficients in line 2 of table 3 show that four variables in addition to race have independent effects on parents' reports of their experiences with teacher practices of parent involvement. Parents with less education (PARED), younger children (GRADE), children whose teachers are leaders in parent involvement (TCHLDR) or whose teachers use other strategies to build close family - school

relationships (PARCOMF, TKNOCH, TALKHLP) report significantly more frequent requests for involvement from teachers than do other parents. Separate analyses show that these effects are about equal for black and white parents. It is easier to measure family categories (such as marital status) than family processes. However, our power to explain parents' experiences with teacher practices of parent involvement improved markedly -- from 5% to 30% -- when we added detailed information on the characteristics and behaviors of parents, students and teachers. It is important that even with powerful interpersonal practices and student needs accounted for, teacher leadership in organizing parent involvement has significant independent effects on parents' experiences with activities that involve them at home in their children's education.

In previous research, marital status has veiled the importance of other variables that influence parental perceptions and reports. Single and married parents' reports are influenced by many family and school factors, not simply by the categorical label of marital status.

Teachers' Reports of Single and Married Parents' Helpfulness and Follow-Through

Parents' marital status is said to influence teachers' opinions of parents and their children. Teachers were asked to rate the helpfulness and follow-through on home-learning activities of the parents of each student. Data from parents identified parental marital status. In contrast to the laboratory study of Santrock and Tracy, 1978, that

asked teachers to rate hypothetical children from one- and two-parent homes, our questions of teachers were designed not to call attention to the students' living arrangements as the teachers evaluated the parents' helpfulness at home or the student's homework completion. We were interested in whether, in a natural environment, teachers' evaluations could be explained by parent marital status or other family characteristics and practices. It is quite likely, however, that elementary school teachers are aware of the family living arrangements from information provided by parents on Emergency Cards each year, from informal exchanges with the parents or the children about their families, or from information exchanged with other teachers about the families at school. However, it is important that in the study the teachers were not asked to base their evaluations on the explicit criterion of the children's living arrangements.

Table 4 presents the teacher evaluations of the quality of the assistance on home-learning activities by single and married parents. Teachers identified their students' parents who were helpful and those who did not follow through on requests to help their children on learning activities at home. The ratings of the quality of parent assistance ranged from +1 to -1, with a mean of .18 and a standard deviation of .70, indicating that most parents were perceived as neither particularly helpful nor inept, but more were helpful (35%) than not (17%).

The comparisons in the first column of table 4 show that teachers rated married parents significantly higher than single parents on

their helpfulness and follow-through on home-learning activities. In the second column, we see that these ratings were influenced by the educational levels of the parents. The better-educated single and married parents received higher ratings from teachers on helpfulness. The difference in ratings was significant between low- and high-educated married parents (.437 vs. .267) and married vs. single high-educated parents (.437 vs. .302).

Table 4 About Here

The third column of table 4 offers important information about how teacher practices of parent involvement affected their evaluations of parents. Teachers who were leaders in the use of parent involvement practices rated single, low-educated parents significantly higher than did teachers who were not leaders in parent involvement (.366 .vs .102). The same pattern appeared for teachers' ratings of single, high-educated parents (.483 .vs .234). Low-educated married parents were considered less responsible assistants than high-educated married parents, regardless of the teacher's leadership in the use of parent involvement.

These and other significant comparisons of teachers' ratings of single and married parents are depicted in Figure 2. Teachers who were not leaders in parent involvement rated low-educated, single parents lower than low-educated, married parents; high-educated,

Table 4

Teachers' Estimates of the Quality of Parents' Responses to Requests for Involvement

Means, standard deviations, and test statistics from multiple comparisons of mean scores of single vs. married, low vs. high educated parents, and parents of children in classrooms of confirmed-leader vs. non-leader teachers in parent involvement

	Family Structure		Parent Education a/		Teacher Leadership in Parent Involvement		Other significant Comparisons of Means
TEACHERS' ESTIMATES OF PARENTS' HELPFULNESS	Single Parent	$\bar{X}$ .227 s.d. .712 N (255)	Low	$\bar{X}$ .174 s.d. .733 N (149)	Confirmed Leader	$\bar{X}$ .366* s.d. .733 N (41)	Single vs. married, high ed. ($\bar{X}$ = .302 vs. .437*)
					Non Leader	$\bar{X}$ .102 s.d. .723 N (108)	Single vs. married, low ed., in Non-leader classroom ($\bar{X}$ =.102 vs. .260*)
			High	$\bar{X}$ .302 s.d. .679 N (106)	Confirmed Leader	$\bar{X}$ .483[a] s.d. .738 N (29)	Single vs. married, high ed, in Non-leader classroom ($\bar{X}$ =.234 vs..436*)
					Non Leader	$\bar{X}$ .234 s.d. .647 N (77)	Low vs. high ed., married, in Non-leader classroom ($\bar{X}$ =.260 vs..436*)
	Married Parent	$\bar{X}$ .346* s.d. .660 N (813)	Low	$\bar{X}$ .267 s.d. .693 N (438)	Confirmed Leader	$\bar{X}$ .291 s.d. .736 N (103)	
					Non Leader	$\bar{X}$ .260 s.d. .680 N (335)	
			High	$\bar{X}$ .437* s.d. .608 N (375)	Confirmed Leader	$\bar{X}$ .444 s.d. .690 N (63)	
					Non Leader	$\bar{X}$ .436 s.d. .591 N (312)	

* t-test significant at or beyond the .05 level.

a/ Parent education is high if the respondent attended or graduated from post-secondary school; low if parent attended or graduated from high school only.

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single parents lower than high-educated married parents; and low-educated married parents lower than high-educated married parents. In contrast, the teachers who were leaders did not give significantly different ratings to single and married parents within educational level.

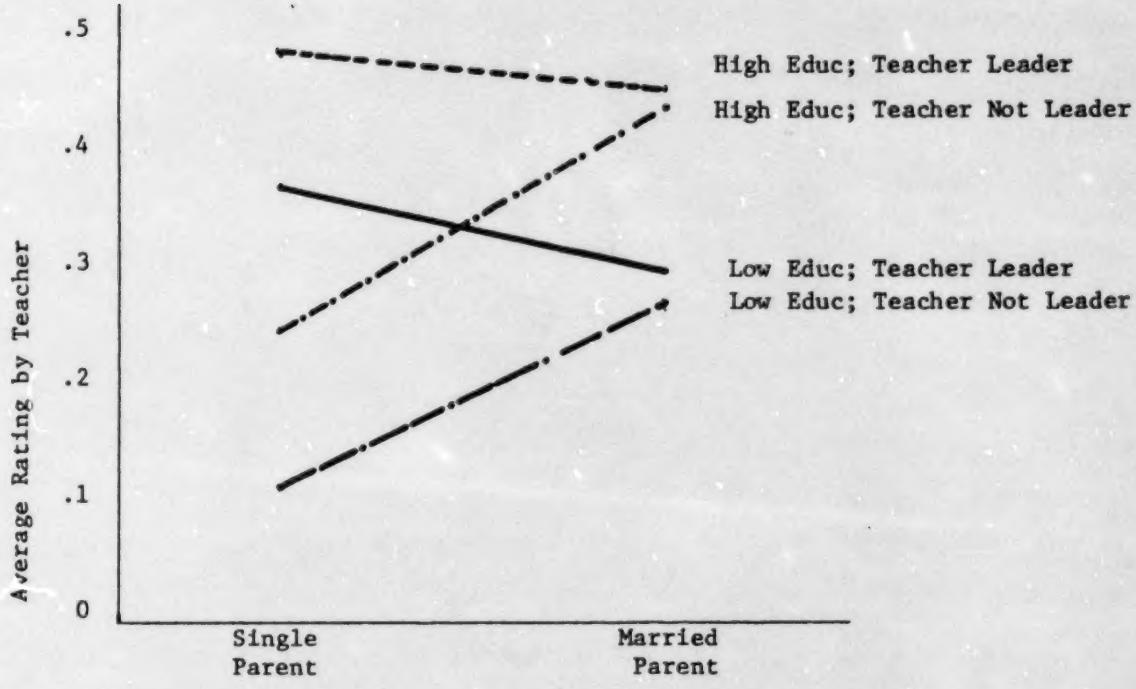
Figure 2 About Here

If we had not included teacher practices in our comparisons, we would conclude that, regardless of education, single parents are considered less cooperative and less reliable in assisting their children at home. What we see instead is that teacher practices of parent involvement influence teacher ratings of the quality of parental assistance. Frequent use of parent involvement reduces or eliminates differential evaluations of single and married parents.

These patterns raise two questions for research: How well does the simple model explain teachers' ratings of parents? Do other characteristics of the family, student, and teacher, improve an understanding of teacher evaluations of single and married parents? Table 5 addresses these questions by showing the results of using our simple model and the results of using the full model, which adds eleven other variables. The regression analyses summarized in Table 5 show, first, that there are significant independent effects of marital status, parents' education, and teacher leadership on how teachers rate the parents of their students on helpfulness and follow through. Although each variable has significant, independent effects, the 3-variable

Figure 2

Average rating by teachers of parents' helpfulness on home learning activities, by parents' marital status and education, and teacher leadership



model explains only 4% of the variance in teacher reports of parent helpfulness.

On the second line of the table, other measures of family, student, and teacher characteristics are added to the basic model and increase the explained variance to 23%. Two types of variables strongly influence teacher ratings of parent helpfulness. Most dramatically, student achievement and behavior in school affects how teachers evaluate the students' parents. Teachers rate parents more positively if their children are high achievers or well-behaved in school. Of course, children may be successful in school because their parents help them at home, or parents may give more help to children who are good students and easy to assist, or good students' may be assumed by teachers to have good parents as part of a home "halo" effect.

Table 5 About Here

Teacher leadership in parent involvement remained an important influence on teacher ratings of parents, even after all other variables were statistically taken into account. Teacher leaders -- who use parent involvement in their regular teaching practice -- acknowledge the help they receive as a result of their organization of parent involvement activities and view parents of low and high achieving students in a more positive light.

Race was not an important variable for explaining teacher ratings of parent helpfulness. Separate analyses of black and white parents

Table 5

Effects of Family, Student, and Teacher Characteristics
on Teacher Reports of Parent Helpfulness and Follow Through on Learning Activities at Home

	FAMSTR[a/]	PARED	TCHLDR	PARWORK	RACE	SEX	ACH	DISC	GRADE	YEARST	TQUAL	PARCOMF	TKNOCH	TALKHLP	R^2
INITIAL MODEL	.072*	.131*	.135*												.039
FULL MODEL	.042	.049	.36*	.014	-.034	-.044	.343*	-205*	-.099*	.104*	-.009	.041	.029	.056	.226
	(.081)	(.131)	(.121)	(.027)	(.039	(.025)	(.365)	(-.256)	(-.079	(.079)	(.051)	(.092)	(.069)	(.050)	

[a/] Variables are: FAMSTR=one- or two-parent homes; PARED=Schooling from less than high school (0) to graduate school (5); TCHLDR=Teacher leadership in the use of parent involvement confirmed by principal (0-4); PARWORK=No work (0) or work (1) outside home by parent; RACE=Black (0) or white (1); SEX=Male (0) or female (1); ACH=Reading and math skills ranked by teacher (0-6); DISC=Low (-1) or High (+1) discipline problems; GRADE=Students' grade in school (1) (3) or (5); YEARST=Number of years teacher experience (0-36); TQUAL=Principal rating of teacher overall quality of instruction and classroom management (0-4); PARCOMF=Parent feeling comfortable and welcome at school (1-4); TKNOCH=Parent report that teacher knows child's individual learning needs (1-4); TALKHLP=Teacher talked to parent about how to help child at home (0/1).

[b/] Standardized regression coefficients are reported. N=1135. *Indicates coefficient is significant at or beyond the .01 level.

[c/] Zero-order correlations are in parentheses.

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revealed that marital status remained a modest but significant influence on the ratings of teachers of white parents, but not black parents. White, single parents were rated lower in helpfulness and follow-through than white married parents, with all other variables in the model statistically accounted for. White single parents may be the most distinct group in terms of their marital status because proportionately more white than black parents are married. Overall, these analyses show that it is mainly the characteristics and needs of the students -- not the simple categorization of parental marital status -- that determine teacher evaluations of parents.

Teachers' Reports of Homework Quality of Children From Single- and Two-Parent Homes

Teachers' were asked to rate the quality of homework completed by their students. Researchers identified the children from one- and two- parent homes from data provided by parents. Teachers identified their students who were homework "stars" and homework "problems." The student's score on the quality of homework ranged from +1 to -1, with a mean of -.01 and a standard deviation of .64, indicating that most students were neither particularly outstanding nor inferior, with about equal numbers of stars (20%) and problems (21%). Teacher ratings of children's homework are shown in Table 6 according to children's living arrangements, parents' education, and leadership of the teacher in the use of parent involvement.

Table 6 About Here

Table 6

Teachers' Estimates of the Quality of Children's Homework Completion

Means, standard deviations, and test statistics from multiple comparisons of mean scores by family structure, family education, and teacher leadership in parent involvement

	Family Structure			Parent Education a/			Teacher Leadership in Parent Involvement			Other significant Comparisons of Means
TEACHERS' ESTIMATES OF STUDENTS' HOMEWORK COMPLETION	Single Parent	$\bar{X}$	-.035	Low	$\bar{X}$	-.101	Confirmed Leader	$\bar{X}$	.073*	Single vs. married, low ed. ($\bar{X}$ = -.101 vs. .050*).
		s.d.	.604		s.d.	.601		s.d.	.648	
		N	(255)		N	(149)		N	(41)	
							Non Leader	$\bar{X}$	-.167	Single vs. married, low ed., in non-leader classroom ($\bar{X}$= -.167 vs. .045*).
								s.d.	.572	
								N	(108)	
				High	$\bar{X}$	.057*	Confirmed Leader	$\bar{X}$	.207*	
					s.d.	.599		s.d.	.620	
					N	(106)		N	(29)	
							Non Leader	$\bar{X}$	.001	
								s.d.	.585	
								N	(77)	
	Married Parent	$\bar{X}$	.100*	Low	$\bar{X}$	.050	Confirmed Leader	$\bar{X}$	.068	
		s.d.	.619		s.d.	.640		s.d.	.630	
		N	(813)		N	(438)		N	(103)	
							Non Leader	$\bar{X}$	.045	
								s.d.	.644	
								N	(335)	
				High	$\bar{X}$	.157*	Confirmed Leader	$\bar{X}$	.254	
					s.d.	.589		s.d.	.595	
					N	(375)		N	(63)	
							Non Leader	$\bar{X}$	.138	
								s.d.	.587	
								N	(312)	

* t-test significant at or beyond the .05 level.

a/ Parent education is high if the respondent attended or graduated from post-secondary school; low if parent attended or graduated from high school only.

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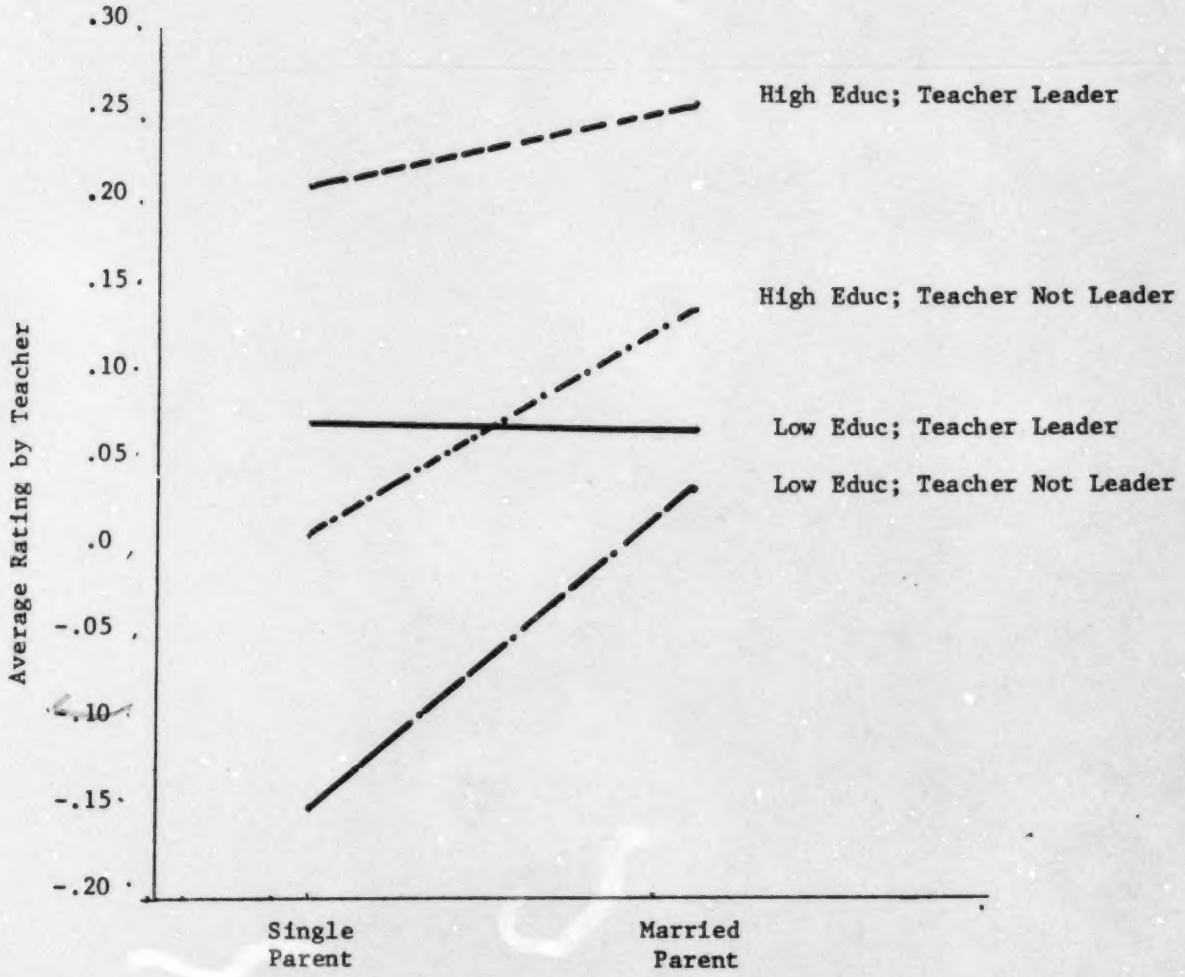
The first column of Table 6 shows that students from two-parent homes were more often rated as "homework stars" and were less often viewed as "homework problems" than were students from one-parent homes. The measures in the second column show that the teachers' ratings were linked to parent education. Children whose parents had little formal education were more often rated lower in homework quality in one-parent (.057 vs. -.101) and in two-parent (.157 vs. .050) homes. Clearly, information on family socioeconomic status helps to explain teachers' evaluations of children in both one- and two-parent homes (Barton, 1981; Laosa and Sigel, 1982; Scott-Jones, 1983).

Teacher practices of parent involvement are taken into account in column 3 and graphed in Figure 3. Within each level of parent education, teachers who were leaders in the use of parent involvement rated students more positively on their homework efforts than teachers who were not leaders. Teachers who were not leaders in parent involvement held significantly lower opinions of the quality of homework of children from single-parent homes than from married-parent homes, at both low- and high-educational levels. The results suggest that children from low-educated, single-parent families (compared with other children from one- or two-parent homes) face disadvantages in school that may be exacerbated by teachers' lack of leadership in mobilizing par nt assistance through well-organized, parent involvement programs.

Figure 3 About Here

Figure 3

Average rating by teachers of children's homework completion, by parents' marital status and education, and teacher leadership



If these estimates of homework quality reflect student achievement in general, children from one- and two-parent homes in teacher leader classrooms should have more similar grades and achievement test scores, net of other important characteristics. In classrooms of teachers who are not leaders in parent involvement, children from one-parent homes may do less well than children from two-parent homes in their report card grades and other school achievements.

The regression analyses in table 7 show how teacher ratings of the quality of students' homework are influenced by other parent, teacher and student characteristics. On the first line of the table, we see that the familiar 3-variable model shows that marital status and parent education have significant, independent effects on teacher ratings of student homework. Students from one-parent homes or whose parents have little education are given lower ratings on homework quality. Teacher leadership is not a significant, independent influence on teacher ratings of students, although it was important for explaining teacher ratings of parents. The basic model explains only 2% of the variance in teacher ratings of student homework.

Table 7 About Here

The second line of Table 7 shows that 24% of the variance in teacher ratings of student homework can be explained with measures of student characteristics. Teacher ratings are mainly influenced by the work students do in class and their classroom behavior. Bright students were rated higher on the quality of their homework, and well-

Table 7

Effects of Family, Student, and Teacher Characteristics
on Teachers' Ratings of Children on their Homework Completion

	FAMSTR[a/]	PARED	TCHLDR	PARWORK	RACE	SEX	ACH	DISC	GRADE	YEARST	TQUAL	PARCOMF	TKNOCH	TALKHLP	R^2
INITIAL MODEL	.085*	.106*	.039												.021
FULL MODEL	.068*	.022	.042	-.024	-.107*	.058	.392*	-.183*	-.007	.050	-.038	-.024	.058	.055	.236
	(.097)	(.114)	(.026)	(-.005)	(-.007)	(.132)	(.412)	(-.259)	(.001)	(.035)	(.021)	(-.005)	(.105)	(.018)	

[a/] Variables are: FAMSTR=one- or two-parent homes; PARED=Schooling from less than high school (0) to graduate school (5); TCHLDR=Teacher leadership in the use of parent involvement confirmed by principal (0-4); PARWORK=No work (0) or work (1) outside home by parent; RACE=Black (0) of white (1); SEX=Male (0) or female (1); ACH=Reading and math skills ranked by teacher (0-6); DISC=Low (-1) or High (+1) discipline problems; GRADE=Students' grade in school management (0-4); PARCOMF=Parent feeling comfortable and welcome at school (1-4): TKNOCH=Parent report that teacher knows child's individual learning needs (1-4); TALKHLP=Teacher talked to parent about how to help child at home (0/1).

[b/] Standardized regression coefficients are reported. N=1135. * indicates coefficient is significant at or beyond .01 level.

[c/] Zero-order correlations are in parentheses.

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behaved students -- whatever their ability -- were given higher ratings on homework quality. The analyses indicate, however, that even with these highly influential variables taken into account, students from two-parent homes were still rated significantly higher than students from one-parent homes on the quality of their homework.

Other variables also influence teachers' ratings of student homework. Black students and female students were rated higher in homework quality, after achievements and behaviors were taken into account. Longitudinal data will be used in future studies to determine if children who receive and complete home assignments improve in school achievements and behaviors, net of ability, more than children who receive less homework or do not complete the work.

The full models in tables 3, 5, and 7, reveal interesting patterns of effects on parent and teacher evaluations of each other. First, parent reports of teacher practices of parent involvement are influenced by several sources including characteristics of students, teachers, parents, and family-school communications. Teacher reports of parents are influenced especially by what the teacher sees and does with the child in school. The child is said to be a reflection of the parent, but it seems to work the other way, too -- the parent is evaluated on the basis of the child's success and behavior in school. The ratings that parents and teachers give each other are significantly affected by teachers' philosophies and practices of parent involvement. Teachers' reports of children are largely determined by the child's activities at school. Some teachers report that children from

one-parent homes have more trouble completing homework than do children from two-parent homes.

Whether or not the mother works outside the home had no important effect on parents' reports about teachers or teachers' reports about parents or children.

Effects of Marital Status and Involvement on Parents' Awareness, Knowledge, and Evaluations of Teachers

Are single and married parents equally aware of their children's teacher and instructional program? Is marital status an important variable for explaining parental receptivity to teachers' suggestions or evaluations of teachers' merits? Epstein, 1983, showed that teacher practices and parents' experiences influenced parental reactions to their children's teachers and schools. Here, we examine whether single and married parents react differently to teacher efforts to involve and inform parents.

Table 8 compares the effects of marital status and level of involvement in home-learning activities on parents' understanding about school and their evaluations of teachers. Each column shows the independent, standardized regression coefficients for marital status and frequent home-learning activities on one parent reaction to the school program or teacher. Each column also summarizes other consistently important school or family factors that influence the particular dependent variable. In the first column, for example, marital

status has no significant effect on whether parents think the child's teacher works hard to get parents "interested and excited about helping at home," but frequent experience with learning activities at home has a strong, significant effect on their awareness of the teacher's efforts. Other variables -- fewer years of formal schooling, teacher's knowledge of the individual needs of the parent's child, and teacher's direct conversations with parents about helping the child at home -- have significant, independent effects on parent awareness of how hard a teacher works to involve parents.

Table 8 About Here

Similar patterns are shown in the other columns of Table 8 for the other dependent measures. Marital status has no effects and frequent experience with learning activities has strong effects on parent reports that they get many ideas from teachers about how to help at home; that the teacher thinks parents should help at home; that they know more about the child's instructional program than they did in previous years; and that the teacher has positive interpersonal skills and high teaching quality. Thus, across several measures, single and married parents improved their understanding of the school program and rated the teachers higher if their children were in the classrooms of teachers who frequently asked parents to conduct learning activities at home.

Table 8

Comparison of effects of marital status and teacher practices on parent reactions to the teacher and school program a/ b/

	PARENTS REPORT THAT					
	Teacher Works Hard	Get Ideas from Teacher	Should Help at Home	Know More About School Program	Teacher High Interpersonal Skills	Teacher Excellent Overall
Marital Status (1- or 2-parent home)	-.044	-.020	-.019	-.017	.050	.010
Requests for Frequent Parent Involvement at Home	.317*	.195*	.247*	.179*	.121*	.168*
Other Significant Variables in Equation c/	.Low parent education .Teacher knows child's individual needs .Teacher spoke to parent about help at home	.Teacher knows child's individual needs	.Race (black) .Younger grade level .Low student achievement	.Low parent education .Younger grade level .Teacher knows child's individual needs	.Parent feels welcome at school .Teacher knows child's individual needs.	.High quality rating from principal .High student achievement .Parent feels welcome at school .Teacher knows child's individual needs.
R^2	.387	.114	.241	.170	.282	.327

a/ Standardized regression coefficients are reported. * indicates coefficient significant at or beyond .001 level. (N=1135)

b/ Variables in the model include: PARENT marital status, education, race, work status, reported requests for parent involvement in learning activities at home; STUDENT grade level, sex, reading and math achievement in class, classroom behavior; TEACHER quality reported by principal, years of teaching experience; TEACHER-PARENT contact — parent comfort at school, teacher knows child's individual needs, talks to parent about home learning activities.

c/ Coefficient is .10 or greater, or variable contributes 1% or more to explained variance.

Other Reports about School From Single- and Married-Parents

Other data collected from parents and summarized in Table 9 help to explain the differences reported in the previous tables and graphs.

Table 9 About Here

- Single parents reported significantly more often than married parents that teachers' requests for involvement were more frequent "this year than any other year," and that they did not always have the "time and energy" to do what the teacher expected.

Single parents felt more pressure from teachers to become involved in their children's learning activities, and believed the teacher thought that parents should help at home. It may be that their children required or demanded more attention or needed more help to stay on grade level. Or it may be that parents who were separated or divorced felt keenly their responsibility for their children. Single parents must divide their time among many responsibilities for family, work and leisure that are shared in most two-parent homes (Glasser and Navarre, 1965; Shinn, 1978). Thus, requests from teachers for time on home-learning activities may make more of an impression and may be more stressful for single parents (McAdoo, 1981).

Table 9

Correlates of Marital Status

	Zero-order Correlations[a/] [b/]
I. SIGNIFICANT CORRELATES	
A. Teacher Characteristics and Practices	
Race of teacher (white)	+.164
Years of teaching experience	+.093
School is run well	-.089
Teacher makes more requests for parent involvement than did previous teachers	-.137
Higher rating by principal of teacher quality	-.167
B. Parent Attitudes and Practices	
More time and energy to fulfill teacher's requests	+.129
More hours parent personal reading	+.092
Active in PTA; more attendance at meetings	+.091
Higher rating by teacher on helpfulness and follow through	+.081
More knowledge this year than previously about child's instructional program	-.097
Believes teacher wants parents to help at home	-.129
Recognizes teacher's efforts to interest parents	-.149
Spends more minutes helping child on home learning activities	-.151
C. Family Resources	
More books at home	+.203
More educational tools at home	+.135
More years of children at same school	+.124
Higher parent education	+.120
D. Child's Attitudes and Behaviors	
Higher math achievement in class[c/]	+.142
Higher rating from teacher on homework completion	+.097
More minutes spent on homework on average night	-.091
More hours watching TV	-.129
II. NON-SIGNIFICANT CORRELATES	
A. Teacher Characteristics and Practices	
Teacher and parents have same goals	+.020
Appropriateness of homework	+.017
Frequency of general communication from school to home	-.003
Usefulness of homework	-.028
B. Parent Attitudes and Practices	
Initiates help if not asked to do so by teacher	+.049
Feels welcome at school	+.043
Frequency of family reading with child	-.010
Higher rating by parent of teacher's overall quality	-.022
Could help more if shown how	-.025
C. Student Attitudes and Behaviors	
Reading achievement in class	.057
Tenseness about homework	.008
Likes to talk with parent about school work	-.027
Discipline problem in school	-.056

[a/] N=1135 parents. Correlates of ± .08 are significant at or beyond .01 level.

[b/] Negative correlate shows association is stronger for single parents; positive correlate for married parents.

[c/] Marital status is not significantly correlated with reading achievement in class, see section II C.

Single parents reported that their children were assigned more minutes of homework on an average evening and that they spent more minutes, on the average, helping their children with home assignments than did married parents. Even with more time spent, however, single parents more often felt that they did not always have enough time or energy to help their children as fully as the teacher expected. Single parents' efforts resulted in increased knowledge about the child's instructional program. In this way they were improving their self-image as involved and knowledgeable parents (Keniston, 1977). Indeed, teachers' programs to increase all parents' involvement may benefit single parents especially. When teachers convey uniform expectations for parent involvement, single parents receive a message that they must perform the same role as married parents as educator at home and informed liason to the school for their children.

- Married parents spent significantly more days in the school as volunteers, as classroom helpers, and at PTA meetings than did single parents. Teachers may be more positive toward parents whom they have met and worked with in the school building and classroom. These positive feelings may have influenced their ratings of the quality of parental assistance at home.

The important fact is, however, that the teacher-leaders -- whose philosophy and practices emphasized parent involvement at home -- did not give significantly lower ratings to single or

low-educated parents on their helpfulness or follow-through on home-learning activities. When teachers use frequent activities as part of their teaching practice, they may help parents build better skills to assist their children at home. At the same time, these activities may help teachers develop more positive expectations and appreciation of parents.

- There are other significant correlates of marital status in Table 9 that are of interest. The top section of the table, IA, shows that the teachers of children of married parents are more often white, and have more years of teaching experience. The teachers of children of single parents are given higher ratings of overall teaching ability by the principal, and single parents more often report that their school is well run. Indeed, single and married parents are remarkably positive about the general conditions of the school, the administration, and the teachers at the elementary school level (Epstein, 1983). Principals' ratings of teaching quality are negatively associated with years of teaching experience ($r = -.141$), indicating that the best teachers do not necessarily have the most experience.

Section IC of table 9 suggests that married parents have more familiarity with school and more resources that make school activities a routine part of life at home. These include more books, more educational tools, more years with children in the same school, higher parent education, and more hours of personal

reading by parents. Home-learning activities may require special scheduling and commitment by the single parents, who have fewer scholastic resources at hand. Single parents may be assisted by the teachers' formal organization of home-learning activities that help them plan for and schedule regular school-related interactions with their children.

The significant correlates in Section ID show that children of married parents tend to do better math work in class, but marital status is not significantly related to children's reading accomplishments in the classroom ($r = .057$ in Section IIC of the table). Single parents report that their children watch more hours of TV and spend more minutes on homework on an average night.

- Importantly, there were some measures on which there were no differences in single and married parents' reports. The non-significant correlates of marital status, listed at the bottom of Table 9, suggest that some common ideas about single and married parents are not statistically supported. Single and married parents made similar evaluations of the appropriateness of the amount and kinds of homework assigned to the child, the overall quality of the child's teacher, the child's eagerness to talk about school, the child's level of tenseness about homework activities, the frequency of most communications (notes, phone calls, memos) from the school to the home, and the extent to

which the teacher shares the parent's goals for the child. These findings support Snow's, 1982, conclusion that single and married parents had similar contacts with teachers, similar evaluations of teachers, and that socioeconomic status was more predictive than marital status of parents' contacts with teachers.

Marital status is not significantly related to severity of discipline problems in class (section IIC). The tendency for children of one-parent homes to be disruptive in school may be one of the "myths" about young children from single-parent families that has perpetuated from earlier studies based on "special problem" populations, and from studies that considered the category of marital status but did not include the student, family, and teacher characteristics and practices that are more important influences on children's classroom behavior. In this state sample of teachers, parents, and children in elementary school, children's disciplinary problems in the classroom are significantly negatively correlated with gender (-.262), academic achievement (-.147), whether the child likes to talk about school at home (-.124) -- but not with marital status. Male students, low-achieving students, and those who do not like to talk about school or homework with their parents, are disciplinary problems in class more than other students.

Marital status is not associated with parents' willingness to help at home, feeling welcome at the school, or with reports that someone at home reads regularly with the child. As in earlier

reports by Eiduson, 1982, and Keniston, 1977, our survey shows that, like married parents, single parents were concerned about their children's education, worked with their children, and were generally positive about their children's elementary schools and teachers.

Summary and Discussion

Researchers have contributed three types of information on single parents. First, descriptive reports offer statistics about single parents and their children. Many reports have focused on the dramatic increase in the prevalence of single parents, the number of children in single-parent homes, racial differences in marital patterns, and the economic disparities of single vs. two parent homes, especially single-mother homes vs. other family arrangements (Bane, 1976; Cherlin, 1982). It is important to document and monitor the trends in separation, divorce, the numbers of children affected, and the emergence and increase of special cases such as teenage single-parents (Mott Foundation, 1981), and never-married parents (U.S. Census, 1982).

Second, specific, analytic studies of the effects of family structure on children or parents go beyond descriptive statistics to consider family conditions and processes that affect family members. Research of this type measures a range of family-life variables -- such as socioeconomic status, family history, family practices, and attitudes such as parental commitment to their children (Adams, 1982;

Bane, 1976; Furstenburg, Nord, Peterson, Zill, 1983; Svanum, Bringle, and McLaughlin, 1982; Zill, 1983). These studies increase our understanding of the dynamics of family life under different social and economic conditions.

Third, integrative, analytic studies of the effects of family structure on children and parents go beyond the boundaries of family conditions to include other institutions that affect family members (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Leichter, 1974; Litwak and Meyers, 1974; Santrock and Tracy, 1978). In this paper we see that the effects of family structure are, in fact, attributable to variables that characterize school and classroom organizations. During the years when families have school-age children, the interplay of families and schools is a critical part of studies of family structure. The current study contributes new knowledge based on data from parents and teachers about family structure and the schools:

1. Single parents are not a single group. The diversity in single-parent homes means that an understanding of families is incomplete if it is based only on the simple category of marital status. In this statewide survey, single parents varied in education, family size, family resources, occupational status, confidence in ability to help their children, and other family practices that concern their children. Single parents' reports suggest that they fulfill their parenting role with about the same level of interaction with and concern for their children as do married parents. Some characteristics may differ in one- and two-parent homes, such as the amount of adult time availa-

ble per child (when there is more than one child), and parent time available to assist at the school. Indeed, the single parents felt they had had less time and energy than needed to complete the teachers' requests for learning activities at home, and they spent significantly fewer days helping at school than did married parents. But these differences do not seem to affect the basic interactions of families with the elementary schools. There is some evidence that marital status affects teacher ratings of children's homework completion, even after children's classroom achievement is taken into account. Future reports will be devoted to the effects on students of teacher practices of parent involvement, and special attention will be given to children from single-parent homes.

2. <u>There is diversity in teacher practices that concern families</u>. Some teachers' philosophies and practices lead them toward more positive attitudes about parents and about how parents can share the teacher's role by assisting their children at home. Teachers who were <u>not leaders</u> in the use of organized and frequent parent involvement practices had lower opinions of the quality of help received from single parents than from married parents, and lower opinions of parents in general than did <u>leaders</u> in the use of parent involvement. Santrock and Tracy, 1978, found that teachers rated hypothetical children from two-parent homes higher on positive traits and lower on negative traits than children from one-parent homes. In actual school settings, we found that teachers differed in their evaluations of children from one- and two-parent homes. Teachers tended to rate children from one-parent homes lower on the quality of their homework, and

teachers who were not leaders made greater distinctions between children from one- and two-parent homes that were otherwise equal in parent education.

3. Teacher leadership, not parent marital status, influenced parent awareness and appreciation of teachers' efforts and knowledge about the school program. Single and married parents whose children were in the classrooms of teachers who were leaders in parent involvement were more aware of teacher efforts, improved their understanding of the school program, and rated teacher interpersonal and teaching skills higher than did parents of children in classrooms of teachers who were not leaders in the frequent use of parent involvement. Parents day-to-day experiences with learning activities at home, and teachers' responsiveness to children and their families -- not marital status -- were the important influences on whether parents knew more about their role in their child's education.

4. Research on single parents and their children must include measures of family and school structures and processes that affect the interactions of parents, teachers, and students. Without measures of the teachers' organization of school and classroom activities that affect children's activities at home, and without measures of student achievements and behaviors that affect how teachers view students and their parents, marital status would look like a more important influence on parents and teachers than it really is. In this paper, full consideration of family and school factors altered conclusions about the importance of family structure on parents and teachers evaluations

of each other, and documented important connections between the two institutions and their members:

Single parents and the schools. Single parents felt more pressure than did married parents to assist their children at home, spent more time on home-learning activities, but still felt that they did not always have enough time and energy to do what was expected by the teacher. Overall, single parents had better relations with teachers who were leaders in the use of learning activities at home than with teachers who did not emphasize parent involvement.

The schools and single parents. Although family members may recover relatively rapidly from the disruption caused by divorce or separation (Bane, 1976; Hetherington, Cox, and Cox, 1978; Zill, 1983), others, whose attitudes favor traditional families, may have difficulty dealing with families who differ from the norm. Our analyses show that teachers who were not leaders in parent involvement rated single and low-educated parents significantly lower than married parents in helpfulness even after parent education, parent involvement at the school, the child's classroom achievement, and other important variables are taken into account. However, teachers who were leaders and who organized active programs of parent involvement were more positive about the quality of assistance received from all parents, including single parents and parents with little formal education.

The teacher's leadership in the frequent use of parent involvement is a statement by the teacher about the continuous and important role parents play in their children's education. The formal organization

of parent involvement in the teacher's regular teaching practice may be especially important for single parents whose family situations make involvement in school activities difficult.

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